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MASTER THESIS

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE THEME OF WOMAN'S INITIATION
IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND DORIS LESSING'S *THE SUMMER*
BEFORE THE DARK

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Title of the Thesis: **A Comparative Study on the Theme of Woman's Initiation in
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Before the Dark***

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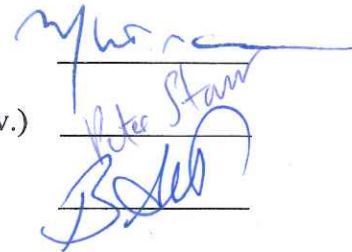
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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study on the Theme of Woman's Initiation in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*

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This study offers some insight into the rise and development of feminist movement, with special focus on a comparative analysis of two novels, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark* – products of the late nineteenth-century American Literature and the late twentieth-century English Literature, respectively. Although these two authors lived in different ages and societies, the female protagonists they portrayed in these two novels have some common features and live through similar problems and follow similar paths to cope with these problems. Undoubtedly, women in the late twentieth century enjoyed greater freedom and better opportunities than those who lived in the previous century. However, it is clear that not much has changed in terms of women's emotional response to their position in society and the kind of problems they were confronted with. For all their differences, what remains the same is women's sense of dissatisfaction with their own lives and their determination to break out of the chains in family and society. Women's familial and social responsibilities prevent them from becoming aware of their own capabilities, realizing their potential, and accomplishing their ideals. In the novels under discussion, two female protagonists - Kate and Edna- go through a process of awakening and self-discovery after a long period of suffering as wives and mothers. Unwilling to follow the established norms

of society, the female protagonists, refuse to fulfill the traditional roles of wifedom and motherhood assigned to them by the patriarchal society. They set out on a journey (both physical and spiritual) in their attempt to achieve autonomy and identity. In the end, Kate (in *The Summer Before the Dark*) decides to return to her family with a heightened sense of confidence and greater feeling of fulfillment, while Edna (in *The Awakening*), who has lost all her hopes for a better life, ends up committing suicide.

Key Words: feminist movement, patriarchy, motherhood, wifedom, identity



ÖZ

Kate Chopin'in *Uyanış* ve Doris Lessing'in *Karanlıktan Önce Yaz* Adlı Romanlarında 'Kadın Uyanışı' Teması Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Çalışma

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Yüksek lisans, İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültür İncelemeleri Bölümü

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Bu çalışma, Kate Chopin'in 19. yüzyılın son çeyreğinde yazılmış olan *The Awakening* (Uyanış) ve Doris Lessing'in 20. yüzyılın son yıllarında yazılmış olan *The Summer Before the Dark* (Karanlıktan Önce Yaz) romanlarının karşılaştırmalı analizi ile feminist hareketin yükselişine ve gelişmesine ışık tutmaktadır. Bahsi geçen bu iki yazar farklı çağ ve toplumda yaşamış olmasına rağmen, romanlarda betimlenen kadın kahramanların bazı ortak özelliklere sahip oldukları, benzer problemlerle karşılaştıkları ve bunlarla başa çıkmak adına benzer yollar izledikleri görülmektedir. Kuşkusuz, 20. yüzyılın son yıllarında yaşayan kadınlar, önceki yüzyılda yaşayan kadınlara nazaran daha fazla özgürlüklere ve fırsatlara sahip olmuştur. Fakat kadınların toplumdaki yerlerine ve karşılaştıkları problemlere karşı duygusal tepkilerinde çok fazla bir değişiklik olmadığı açıktır. Tüm farklılıklarına rağmen, kadınların yaşamlarındaki tatminsizlik hissi ile aile ve toplum içerisindeki zincirleri kırmak için kararlılıkları aynı kalmıştır. Kadınların ailevi ve sosyal sorumlulukları; onların kapasitelerinin, potansiyellerinin farkına varmalarına ve amaçlarına ulaşmalarına engel olmuştur. İncelenen romanlarda, iki kadın kahraman -Kate ve Edna- eş ve anne olarak uzun süren sıkıntılı zamandan sonra uyanış ve kendilerini keşfetme sürecinden geçerler. Toplum tarafından kabul edilen kurallara uymaya isteksiz olan kadın kahramanlar, erkeğin egemen olduğu toplum tarafından belirlenen geleneksel eş ve anne rollerini yerine getirmeyi reddederler. Kendi

bağımsızlıklarına ve kimliklerine ulaşabilmek amacıyla fiziksel ve zihinsel bir yolculuğa çıkarlar. Sonunda, Kate (*Karanlıktan Önce Yaz / The Summer Before the Dark*) özgüveni ve hayattan memnuniyeti artan bir insan olarak ailesine dönerken, daha iyi bir hayata dair tüm umutlarını yitiren Edna (*Uyanış / The Awakening*) yaşamına son verir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: feminist hareket, ataerki, annelik, eşlik, kimlik





To my wonderful mother

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF NON-PLAGIARISM	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv,v
ÖZ.....	vi, vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I:	
1.1. MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD.....	12
1.2. SOCIAL OPPRESSION.....	19
CHAPTER II:	
2.1. DISCOVERY OF FEMALE SEXUALITY.....	26
2.2. DREAMS AND MEMORIES.....	31
CHAPTER III:	
3.1. RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL NORMS AND DOMESTIC DUTIES.....	40
CONCLUSION	47
WORKS CITED	51
CURRICULUM VITAE	56

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TSBD: The Summer Before the Dark:

TA: The Awakening





INTRODUCTION

This study builds around a comparative analysis of two novels - Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark* - in terms of the experiences of two female protagonists who go through a process of awakening and self-discovery in their attempts to achieve identity. Within this context, the First Chapter deals with a discussion of the factors leading to the desire to achieve identity and analyzes the psychological distress of two characters who feel trapped in society as well as in their own family because of their roles as a wife and mother. Actually, each chapter presents the development of the protagonists' self-awareness to see themselves as independent individuals and to question their identity as a mother and wife. Chapter II develops around the two protagonists' refusal to assume these traditional roles in their attempt to create a new identity for themselves. These characters question their past and present with the help of the recollections from childhood and dreams, which makes it easier for them to gain insight into their inner-worlds and analyze their own behaviors. Additionally, both protagonists discover their own sexuality as a woman, which has been neglected for a long time due to the roles assigned to them by society. Finally, Chapter III depicts how these female protagonists are confronted with barriers in the process of discovering themselves and becoming conscious of their potential in the face of the societal pressures and expectations imposed on them all through their lives.

In order to gain an understanding into the motives of the two female protagonists in the two novels, one must have some background knowledge about feminism, which can be defined as "the struggle to end sexist oppression" (Hooks, 238). It would not be wrong to describe feminists as people who "concern

themselves with women's inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex" (Freedman, 2001: 1). It can be argued that the goal of the feminist movement is not to ensure that women will achieve superiority over men, nor does it aim at giving women a privileged position in society. Rather, the movement aims to provide equal opportunities for women in social, economic and political life. In the United States, the women's rights movement dated back to the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 which was organized in New York in order to create a platform for people to exchange views on social, religious and civil conditions of women. The Convention showed itself as a revolutionary undertaking designed to support women in their struggle to achieve equal rights for women. At the end of the convention, the Declaration of Sentiments was produced, as it found expression in the American Declaration of Independence. This achievement was seen as a concrete step for spreading the issue of women's rights in social, economic and political life.

In Britain, the struggle to give women equal rights in society began in 1840s with women's suffrage movements. However, before the appearance of the suffrage movements, women had already started to write about "the inequalities and injustices in women's social condition" (Freedman, 2001: 2). The first wave included women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the world, which focused mainly on legal issues, in particular - women's right to vote. In Britain, with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, men enlisted in the army and women took on many jobs traditionally assigned to men, such as driving buses, building ships, and working in agriculture. The second wave, which aimed to promote legal and social equality for women, started in the early 1960s in the United States and spread across the world. Although the first wave of feminist movement was mainly concerned with gaining rights to vote and have property, the scope of the movement gradually widened with the introduction of new issues such as sexuality, family, workplace and reproduction. One of the vital issues of the feminists in the second-wave, in Margaret Walters's words, is "a woman's rights over her own body" (Walters, 2005: 110). The protests at the Miss America contest between the years of 1968-1969 gave further impetus to the movement, making it more visible in a wider

context. According to the protestors, “the beauty contest was a symbol of the way women in general are objectified, diminished, and judged primarily on appearance” (Walters, 2005: 108). In addition to these, the main aim of the second-wave feminists was to “reduce patriarchy” so that the patriarchy would not be a barrier preventing women from pursuing their career (Iannello, 2010: 72-73). As a result of this wave, the number of women who found job opportunities in various fields such as military, media and sports has significantly increased. Having been successful in acquiring certain rights in the first two waves of feminism -such as the right to vote, to work, and to have a better education, feminists initiated a third-wave movement, which started in the 1990s, had “the potential to empower women by helping them shatter the ‘glass ceiling’ in politics, business, and other fields to which women have limited access...” (Iannello, 2010: 71). Third-wave feminists claimed that the second-wave feminism lacked variety as it was led by “white affluent women”. On the contrary, third- wave feminism comprised people from various cultural backgrounds as well as those with different sexual preferences, such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals. Like the second-wave feminists who argued against the tendency in the media to regard women as sexual objects, which was often referred to as “victim feminism”, third-wave feminists set themselves firmly against the idea of victim feminism and supported “power feminism” which stems from “a sense of individualism” (Iannello, 2010: 72). The essence of “sexual liberation”, which was the main objective of second-wave feminism, gained a different dimension with third-wave feminism, as a greater importance was attached to becoming aware of one’s gender identity and sexuality, which has been shaped by society for many years.

To sum up, from the first to the third wave of feminism, women have achieved equal rights with men in public and private spheres of life. In order to gain equal citizenship with men, advocates of the feminist movement have always opposed the patriarchal structure of society. While second-wave feminists struggled against the patriarchal society in which women were excluded from political rights, third-wave feminists struggled against the patriarchy which restricts women with “societal constraints and labels”. According to Rosemarie Tong, third-wave

feminism is “a new kind of feminism that is not so much interested in getting women to want what they should want...” Tong continues,

If a woman wants to wear makeup, have cosmetic surgery and wear sexually provocative clothes, she should feel free to do so, provided she feels empowered by her actions and not somehow demeaned, diminished, or otherwise objectified by them” (Tong, 2009: 288).

Based on Tong’s argument, one can claim that third-wave feminists wanted to break the general stereotype views against women and concentrated more on the idea of “individual identity” rather than on the issue of political rights.

All through history, women have always been viewed as physically and mentally weaker than their male counterparts, and as confined to their domestic lives by those who have ‘traditional gender role attitudes’ (Mickelson, Chong, Don, 2013: 2). Those who advocate traditional gender role attitudes believe that the most important duty of a woman is to get married and have children. On the other hand, supporters of ‘egalitarian gender role attitudes’ believe that women are not obliged to stay at home and carry out domestic issues (Mickelson, Chong, Don, 2013: 2). They believe that men and women should be equally responsible for looking after children and organizing household chores. Fed up with carrying the heavy burden of motherhood and domestic life, and motivated by a desire to pursue a career, a considerable number of women have wished to break out of the chains that preventing them from realizing their potentials. As Margaret Walters contends, throughout history women in different countries and societies tried to express “their wishes, complaints and needs in different ways” (Walters, 2005: 2). With the growing popularity of expressions introduced by the French Revolution (1787-1799), such as ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’, women who were not satisfied with their lives tried to voice their discontents with their status in society. The common tendency to use the word ‘man’ to refer to the entire society has urged women to strive to gain the position they deserved within the society. As Elshtain points out,

Women have been excluded from the full range of possibilities and responsibilities available within the categories ‘person’ and ‘citizen’ because the category ‘woman’ has alone been sufficient to differentiate such human beings from the category ‘male’ which has been synonymous with ‘person’ or ‘human being’ (Elshtain, 1975: 459).

A great number of women who wanted to have equal rights to men published many works depicting their inferiority within the society. In fact, the status of women in society has been questioned particularly by the prominent figures in Feminist Movement.

During the 18th century in Western Culture, Mary Astell, one of the earliest and leading figures in Feminist Movement, believed that women living in a patriarchal society could not find any space to escape and that’s why their mental abilities could not develop sufficiently. In her first book, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Astell emphasized that the ladies needed to take themselves seriously, make their own choices, and develop their minds and capabilities. In this century, there were ‘conduct books’ addressing to women alone, which were designed to teach them ‘womanly virtues’ such as ‘meekness’, ‘piety’ and ‘charity’. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the most influential Feminist authors of the time, argues that the type of education designed for women in that period aimed to teach them the norms of kindness, the importance of graceful conduct, and to prepare them for a good marriage. Moreover, Wollstonecraft maintains that most women lived through hard experiences in their childhood and were subjected to oppression in their families. Thus, they were taught to become submissive to patriarchal authority. According to this author, women were regarded as second-class citizens in the contemporary society, and that they were ostracized from the society. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft compared women to the members of “the feathered race, birds that are confined to cages and that have nothing to do but preen themselves and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch” (quoted in Tong, 2009: 13). For ages, women were kept inside the cage, and

were expected to act in a mechanical way in a patriarchal society. As Wollstonecraft points out, the women were not allowed to determine their preferences on their own and they did not find any chances to develop their potentials and rationalities within the society (quoted in Tong, 2009: 13). Additionally, Wollstonecraft strongly disapproves of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas presented in his treatise on Education, *Emile* (1762), in which Rousseau considers the development of rationality to be the most important goal in any educational program designed to train boys, totally excluding girls from such a program. According to Rousseau, "... men should be educated in virtues such as courage, temperance, justice, and fortitude, whereas women should be educated in virtues such as patience, docility, good humor, and flexibility" (quoted in Tong, 2009: 14). There were sharp distinctions between men and women; women remained 'an understanding, responsive wife and a caring, loving mother' while men were glorified and given some such sorts of traits as 'self-governing citizen' and 'a dutiful paterfamilias' (quoted in Tong, 2009: 14). For Wollstonecraft, the society should provide women with the same kind of education offered to men, as all humans are intrinsically worthy of developing their potentials so they could attain 'full personhood' (quoted in Tong, 2009: 15).

The 19th century did not bring much change for women in terms of their status in the society. In Britain, women were not seen as economically, socially and politically equal to men. They were not independent human beings and were expected to devote all their lives to their husbands and children. In terms of employment, women did not have adequate opportunities for working outside. ("OCR GCSE History B: Modern World History," n.d.). Women's inferior status in the male-dominated British society can be clearly seen in a speech by Charles Hobhouse, a conservative Liberal politician:

The inclusion of women in politics would harm the number, character, and strength of our future race. It would limit women's ability and inclination for motherhood, and would lead to their unwillingness to manage the home, and home is the first and lasting strength of social life in all countries.

("OCR GCSE History B: Modern World History," n.d.).

Among the outstanding figures of this period is Marion Reid who, in her work 'A Plea for Women', criticized the proper conduct expected of women in a society characterized by gender biases: "good humor and attention to her husband, keeping her children neat and clean, and attending to domestic arrangements." Reid considered this type of behavior as 'self-renunciation' on the part of women, which leads to self-extinction, in fact "a most criminal self-extinction'. She argued that most girls were raised in such a way as to perform "a mechanical duty." Obviously, in a society dominated by male values women were deliberately excluded from participating in social life and denied political as well as educational rights. Furthermore, the society perceived women's involvement in social and political life as a threat to male authority. In his work *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill emphasized the significance of women's role in society with his conviction that "the subordination of women was both wrong and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement." To quote Mill further on the subject,

...if women's rational powers were recognized as equal to men's, then society would reap significant benefits: public-spirited citizens for society itself, intellectually stimulating spouses for husbands, a doubling of the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity, and a multitude of very happy women (quoted in Tong, 2009: 18).

As Mill pointed out, women should be regarded as valuable individuals capable of making a significant contribution to society. Viewed from this perspective, instead of seeing women as a potential threat for the male authority, society should provide women with better educational opportunities. This will help the creation of more independent and self-confident individuals who are self-sufficient and well aware of their powers of reasoning and capable of realizing their full potential. As Mary Wollstonecraft puts it, the ultimate goal must be to create "...a woman strong in mind and body, a person who is not a slave to her passions, her husband, or her children' (quoted in Tong, 2009: 15).

In the early 20th century, the number of women who found employment in such places as factories, hospitals and engineering services increased significantly following the First World War since millions of men joined the army in Britain. Undoubtedly, the war created positive effects for women, providing them with greater opportunity to participate in work life. During the war, some women volunteered to join the army to help soldiers, while others filled in men's places in working areas. This change in woman's role in society inspired women with a strong sense of belonging to their own society, making them feel more valuable ("OCR GCSE History B: Modern World History," n.d.). Equal opportunities afforded to women in educational and social life in areas such as training and teaching at the university helped women develop the feeling that they were an important part of society, making them feel more self-confident. In her book, *The Second Sex*, the feminist author Simone de Beauvoir argues that throughout history "woman has been denied full humanity, denied the human right to create, to invent, to go beyond mere living to find a meaning for life in projects of ever-widening scope" (quoted in Walters, 2005: 98). Quite in line with this argument, Margaret Walters says, "woman is always and archetypally other. She is seen by and for men, always the object and never the subject" (Walters, 2005: 98). Another prominent figure in the women's liberation movement in the United States, Betty Friedan brings a different perspective to this issue. In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan says, "the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity". According to Friedan,

. . . as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role (Friedan, 2001: 101).

To quote Friedan further on the subject:

Truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for... All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children (Friedan, 2001: 44).

Friedan defines women's misery and dissatisfaction with their lives in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States as "the problem that has no name" (Friedan, 2001: 48). Many of them pretend that they are happy and satisfied as a wife and mother, but they sometimes say "I feel empty somehow...feel as if I don't exist" (Friedan, 2001: 48). In fact, it is not so easy for women to develop a sense of self. As Friedan puts it, "Neither her husband nor her children nor the things in her house, nor sex, nor being like all the other women, can give her a self" (Walters, 2005: 102).

Based on the background information about the formation and development of the feminist movement in Britain and the United States, one can move on to present some biographical information on Doris Lessing and Kate Chopin from a feminist perspective. Doris Lessing (1919-2013), born in Persia (now Iran), was a British writer. In general terms, her works are concerned with themes such as "global starvation, poverty, memory, madness, the meaning of aging, the texture of lives lived, liberation of both women and men, and of self-scrutiny" (Widmann, 1973: 582). Although Lessing did not describe herself as a feminist author, she was regarded as a "feminist icon" in literary world as her works deal with women's experiences. Among her works, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) was viewed by many advocates of feminist movement in 1960s as an impressive work depicting female experiences in society (Mukherjee, 2012: 6). Like *The Golden Notebook*, which focuses on "an independent woman's relationships with men and women in a time of re-examining sexual and political norms", *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) is seen as "a modern feminist novel" concerned with "the pressures of social conformity, pain of aging and mental breakdown that a woman undergoes while searching for freedom, self-awareness and

questioning her domestic responsibilities” (Ayan, 2015: 2). During her life time, Lessing explicitly showed resistance to the established norms of her society which deliberately created biological and cultural discrimination against women. Even worse, for generations this discriminating attitude forced women “to sink without a murmur into marriage and motherhood”. Commenting on the position of women in her mother’s time, Lessing said, “It was as if their lives came to a stop when they had children. Most of them got pretty neurotic – because, I think, of the contrast between what they were taught at school they were capable of being and what actually happened to them”. Lessing also believed that, being an author, she was more independent than most people. Lessing felt so independent in her literary career that she chose her career over her children. This point becomes clear in her remark that “there is nothing more boring for an intelligent woman than to spend endless amounts of time with small children”. In 1939, Lessing married Frank Charles Wisdom. The marriage lasted five years and left her with two children. A year after the divorce, Lessing married Gottfried Anton Nicholas Lessing. She had one child from this marriage, which lasted five years. Unlike Chopin, Lessing felt that marriage was not meant for her, a feeling that is clearly reflected in her comment on the subject: “I do not think marriage is one of my talents. I’ve been much happier unmarried than married”.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Kate Chopin (1851-1904) was an American author who wrote novels and short stories. As a child, Chopin did not have male role models since her father died when she was four years old, and she was raised by “independent women” at home -her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. At school she was trained by a female priest. Later in life, she did not have any important problems in her marriage with Oscar Chopin, who died early leaving her alone with six children. She did not feel any remorse for “her marriage” or “being a mother” (Taş, 2011: 414). In literary world, Chopin was considered to be one of the leading feminist authors of the 20th century. No sooner was her work *The Awakening* published in 1899 than it met with harsh criticism from the many literary and religious circles of the late Victorian era. This reaction resulted from the fact that her work involved “a woman protagonist with active sexual desires, who dares to leave her husband and her children, falls in

love with a man younger than her, and has an affair with another man” (Taş, 2011: 413). Severely criticized by literary and religious circles for this unconventional novel which deals with the theme of “a woman’s search for sexual freedom in the repressive society of the American South during the Victorian era,” Chopin was forced to give up her professional career in literature for a while (Taş, 2011: 413). Despite the criticisms it was subjected to, *The Awakening* was rediscovered in the 1960s, by feminist scholars who considered Chopin’s protagonist as a “prototype of feminism” (Taş, 2011, 413).

A major factor that accounts for the predominance of feminist themes in *The Awakening* was Chopin’s marriage to an affluent Creole man, Oscar Chopin. Soon after getting married, the couple settled in New Orleans where she collected her own experiences of the Creole culture, in which “life for women was mainly based on restrictions and moral or social codes as well as sexual double standards” (Dhir, 2011: 5). Chopin used the material based on these experiences when writing this novel.

CHAPTER I

1.1 MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

One of the fundamental motives that drives Kate Brown in *The Summer Before the Dark* and Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* to begin their own journey of self-discovery is that both characters feel trapped in their roles as wife and mother in their respective families. In *The Summer Before the Dark*, Kate is portrayed as a forty-five-year old woman with four children. Actually, she seems to be happily married to Michael Brown for twenty-five years and lives with her family in South London. One evening she understands that her role in the family has changed for the worse over time. While Kate and her family are having their dinner, one of her sons, who is sixteen years old, shouts at his mother saying that she is suffocating him. At this point, Kate desperately realizes that “she has become a clog to her children” and “she has fallen from the position of a purposive, necessary, ministering being to that of a being unwanted, indeed barely endured” (Verleun, 1985: 623). Feeling that she is no longer needed by her husband and children, Kate makes up her mind to change her way of life and live through different kinds of experiences during the summer period. For the first time, her husband and grown-up children decide to spend their summer vacation in different places while she decides not to go to the States with her husband. Her husband plans to work for an American hospital for some months and her children plan to take a trip for various reasons such as visiting their friends or making archaeological excavations in different parts of the world. Below is an extract from *The Summer Before the Dark*, which shows that Kate has always been in service for her husband and children during her life.

For her, the coming months stretched ahead as they had done for many past summers. She would be a base for members of the family coming home from university, or dropping in for a day or a week on their way somewhere else; she would housekeep for them, their friends, their friends' friends. She would be available, at everyone's disposal (*TSBD*, 11).

In these lines, Kate is described as a typical housewife who sacrifices herself for everybody's comfort and happiness in the family. She portrays herself as a "pretty, healthy, serviceable woman" (*TSBD*, 10). In her sociological work, *Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan depicts the miserable position of women in society who are "chained to domesticity." Friedan regards this predicament as "a problem that has no name". Similarly, Doris Lessing calls attention to this never-ending problem of women through the experience of Kate Brown, who is portrayed as "a trapped housewife" (Aghazadeh, 2011: 15). During the summer, Kate finds enough time to question her traditional female roles like running the house and taking care of the children. After spending all her time as a loyal wife and protective mother for years, Kate's "buried" and "unspoken pain" (Aghazadeh, 2011: 15) troubles her mind. Gradually, she realizes that "she and her contemporaries were machines set for one function, to manage and arrange and adjust and foresee and order and bother and worry and organize; that is, "To fuss" (*TSBD*, 52). For years, as she accepts and deeply internalizes her domestic responsibilities, Kate never complains to her family members about them. What is more, she seems to have been drifted into a kind of life dictated by the needs of her husband and children; yet, she does not have enough courage and strength to break out of the chains surrounding her (Aghazadeh, 2011: 14). Throughout the novel, the themes of "marriage and motherhood" are treated by images suggestive of "imprisonment" (Klein, 2002: 235). Realizing that she has been leading a life just to please the other members of the family, as suggested by the phrase, "inside the timetable of other people's needs" (49). Actually, Kate's desire to escape from the obligations of wifedom and motherhood is a vital step to retain her mental health (Klein, 2002: 235). Not surprisingly, Kate considers the institution of marriage to be indispensable to her life, as seen in this statement: "If she had not married - but good God, she would have been mad not to marry, mad to choose

Romance languages and literature” (*TSBD*, 13). It is evident that throughout her marriage, Kate has always been “a full time wife who falls victim to despair after realizing that her real ‘self’ has been in a cold storage” (Lazar, 2013: 65). Having no university education and bound by an early marriage, Kate has never had a chance to become part of work life. One day, a job offer she gets changes her life altogether. Kate is offered a temporary job by Alan Post, one of her husband’s friends. Yet, Kate remains almost speechless with a sort of panic when she receives the job offer. Also, the doubts and fears she has experienced about taking up the job show that she has been faced with dilemma in her life. This point is clearly stated in the extract below:

Michael and Alan Post were helping themselves to coffee, and waiting for her. What she was feeling was a kind of panic. Knowing this made it worse. It was stupid and irrational to feel frightened. What of? This was not something she could have confessed to anyone, not even Michael—that when actually faced with a job, quite an ordinary sort of job after all, well within her powers, and obviously only for a short time, she felt like a long-term prisoner who knows she is going to have to face freedom in the morning. (*TSBD*, 13-14)

This extract shows how Kate’s presence in communal life as well as her competences and potentials have been underestimated, and how she has been excluded from work life for many years. She is just expected to stay at home, serve her husband or children and say nothing to do with her life. Having led a suffocating life restricted by the demands of her husband and children, Kate has sacrificed her dreams, ideals and values to pleasing the family members. Now, she has found the opportunity to change the course of her life. Her job as a translator at an international conference will be an important step in her attempt to achieve identity.

In the later years of her marriage, with four children at home, Kate is faced with the obligation to assume more and more responsibilities. The extract below

reveals that she feels literally crushed under the heavy burden of extra responsibilities,

With three small children, and then four, she had had to fight for qualities that had not been even in her vocabulary. Patience. Self-discipline. Self-control. Self-abnegation. Chastity. Adaptability to others—this above all. This always. These virtues, necessary for bringing up a family of four on a restricted income, she did slowly acquire (*TSBD*, 51).

Kate continually questions her domestic responsibilities which seem to have suppressed the freedom that she once enjoyed. As she does so, she feels confused about whether the qualities stated above are really virtues or not (Klein, 2002: 232),

But virtues? Really? Really virtues? If so, they had turned on her, had become enemies. Looking back from the condition of being an almost middle-aged wife and mother to her condition as a girl when she lived with Michael, it seemed to her that she had acquired not virtues but a form of dementia (*TSBD*, 51).

Based on these extracts, one can argue that Kate has always played the mother role to meet her family's requirements. As an altruistic wife and mother who has fully dedicated her life to her family, she has always been thoughtful and sensitive towards the needs of her husband and children.

The most devastating crisis that occurs in Kate's marriage is her bitter realization that her husband cheated her with other women while he was abroad. For many years, Kate has tolerated the immoral behavior of her husband to keep her marriage going, and to avoid the feeling of disgrace that she would suffer if she got a divorce. More importantly, Kate does not feel strong enough to leave her husband and children as she has been conditioned to accept and internalize the idea

of women's subordination in a patriarchal society. However, Kate's continued tolerance of this situation later ends up with her loss of respect for her husband as they have lost the chance to establish a trusting relationship between them. The following extract reveals Kate's feelings about her predicament:

There was the crisis when Michael had fallen tormentedly in love with a younger colleague at the hospital. By then the marriage had accommodated very many strains and surprises. It was ten years old; the children were born... She had understood—he had allowed her to understand—that he was having, occasionally and discreetly, and with every care for her, the wife's, dignity, affairs with young women who would not be hurt by them: affairs of the kind that blossomed among the delegates and the machinery of conferences in the great Organizations of the world. She had accepted it... At this point, the pattern of Kate's thought, or memories, quite simply dissolved. Some of it was true: they had been right in making sure they did not expect too much from each other, or from marriage. But for the rest—the truth was, she had lost respect for her husband (*TSBD*, 37-38).

Like Kate, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier, is desperately trapped in her marriage and in her role as a mother. Edna is a typical housewife married to Léonce Pontellier, who comes from upper-class Creole society. A woman with two little children, Kate has all the opportunities that a woman can have in her life; however, she is not happy with her situation. After having two children, she “considers herself in a marriage that lacks love, but something expected of her” (Taş, 2011: 416). Undoubtedly, her husband's complaints about Kate's failure to fulfill her motherhood and domestic responsibilities make her feel more unhappy and desperate in her own world as seen in the quotation below,

He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after

children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. (*TA*, 9)

Oppressed by the requirements of a traditional marriage, Edna is under the obligation to take care of her husband and children, but she is unable to fulfill her responsibilities, for she “was not a mother-woman” (*TA*, 12). In this sense, Edna was quite different from the other women at Grand Isle who “idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (*TA*, 11-12).

Rejecting this traditional attitude toward women, Chopin criticizes the way women’s lives are shaped by the male conception of motherhood which deprives them of their individual identity and causes them to develop a sense of inferiority. This revolt against the traditional roles assigned to women in patriarchal society is clearly manifested in Edna’s growing dissatisfaction with her life and her subsequent refusal to perform the traditional duties expected of women (Streater, 2007: 407). Edna’s rejection of the role of motherhood imposed on her by society can be clearly seen in her attitude towards her children. She seems to be severely oppressed by their existence. This point becomes clear in the following extract from the novel:

Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her (*TA*, 30).

Edna regards the motherly duty of taking care of her children as a heavy burden; so, when her children spend the rest of their holiday with their grandmother, she considers their absence as “a first breath of freedom” (*TA*, 30). It is only when her husband and children are away from home that she feels herself free from the requirements of marriage and motherhood. What is more, Edna thinks that “either

her independent life or her family's future can be a success, but the two cannot coexist" (Mainland, 2011: 83-84).

The boys respond to Edna's cold attitude with a similar kind of indifference that she shows them. She treats her children without love and affection, which confronts them with the obligation to stand on their own feet. In fact, the most important feature of her children is their "self-sufficiency" (Mainland, 2011: 76). This situation is highlighted in the quotation below,

If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of the eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. (*TA*, 12)

Edna had lost her mother when she was too young to endure the agony of seeing her death. As Edna suffered from lack of maternal love, warmth, and care in her childhood, she could neither develop maternal feelings nor deeply internalize the role of motherhood. Unable to nurture her children with maternal feelings such as love, care and warmth, Edna brings them up as self-contained individuals like herself (Mainland, 2011: 76).

On the other hand, Edna's marriage is described as "purely an accident" (*TA*, 29). Before marrying Mr. Pontellier, Edna thought that there was a physical and emotional closeness between them. Also, she believed that they would share similar thoughts and feelings through the long path of marriage. Eventually however, Edna realizes that her expectations from marriage are quite different from her husband's. As a matter of fact, Leonce has often considered his wife as a possession rather than a partner, and Edna was painfully aware of this fact. On one occasion, when they were on holiday on the island, Leonce noticed that Edna was sunburned from swimming, he looked at his wife "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (*TA*, 3). It is evident that Edna is unhappy with her marriage because of her husband's unemotional and

condescending attitude toward her as well as the lack of communication between them. Alienated from her husband, Edna contemplates on her situation, trying to find out an outlet from her predicament. While she is spending time with her friends, Adèle Ratignolle and Robert Lebrun, on the island, with whom she has long talks, she starts to question her existence and relations with her family and other people as an individual in the process of discovering her true self. This point is clearly illustrated in the following extract,

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight-perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman. (*TA*, 21)

1.2 SOCIAL OPPRESSION

In order to understand Kate and Edna's roles in society, one should first have an idea about "patriarchal society" in which women are obliged to conform to societal expectations. In general terms, patriarchal society can be described as "any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles" (quoted in Kämpenberg, 2006). Women are seen as the property of men and expected to submissively perform domestic activities in their families as well as in society; by contrast, men are expected to be strong and considered superior to women in society. Intrinsically, women are conditioned to internalize the roles traditionally assigned to them in society since "the male power [must insinuate] itself into the psyche of women, teaching them to collaborate in defining themselves as subordinate to, and dependent on, men" (quoted in Kämpenberg, 2006).

In the patriarchal conception of the 19th century, women were expected to be “objects in marriage and in motherhood, existing as vessels of maternity and sexuality, with little opportunity for individuality” (quoted in Bai, 2014: 847). Women should comply with the requirements of marriage and motherhood in an oppressive society. As women desperately realize that all doors are closed in all fields of social life, they remain as “attachments of men” (Bai, 2014: 847). Within this framework, Kate Chopin’s novel, *The Awakening*, focuses on the issue of gender discrimination in the late 19th century, with a view to helping women find out a way to gain their own independence and individuality in a society based on male authority (Bai, 2014: 847). As a novel written with a feminist perspective, *The Awakening* reflects the need for women to achieve “self-ownership”, in other words, “a woman’s right to have possession of her own fully realized human identity,” which was a fundamental concern of the feminist movement in the 19th century.

The female characters in both novels experience harsh and condemning situations in their own societies, which view the male as the authority figure. Having lost her mother at an early age, Edna, together with her two sisters, was raised by a father who “coerced his own wife into her grave” (*TA*, 113) in a male-dominated home. Deprived of maternal love and oppressed by her father - “a strict, unyielding product of patriarchal dominance” (Gray, 2004: 65) - consequently, Edna developed a personality without human warmth and affection, which can be seen in the way she treated her family. For instance, Edna feels so detached from her sister that she does not want to attend her wedding party, thinking that “a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (*TA*, 104). Upon learning that Edna refuses to attend the wedding party, her father criticizes Leonce, her husband, for his tolerant attitude to his wife. His “patriarchal and controlling” (Taylor and Fineman, 1996: 37) views on marriage are clearly seen in the way he warns Edna’s husband, ““You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Leonce . . . Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it” (*TA*, 112-113). As a strong supporter of patriarchal system, Edna’s father believes that women should obey the established norms of the society (Kämpenberg, 2006).

While Edna hopes for a marriage based on the equality of spouses, Leonce wants to control Edna's life and dominate her, just like her father. Edna and her husband widely disagree on woman's role and responsibilities in family primarily because Leonce speaks "a third language –social customs" (Elz, 2003: 15), which Edna fails to understand. Leonce feels concerned about Edna's irresponsible attitudes towards him, which is clearly seen in what he says about his wife when talking to a friend: "She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women; and -you understand- we meet in the morning at the breakfast table" (*TA*, 103). Like her father, Edna's husband shows his unchanging patriarchal views, which become manifested in his overwhelming desire to control her. However, the image of "mother-woman", the role expected of women in the patriarchal society of the 19th century, does not suit Edna's personality, for it reduces women to the position of a mere object (Gray, 2004: 60).

Both protagonists, Edna and Kate, encounter several characters who help them gain insight into the true nature of their position at home as well as in society, and feel the need to question their domestic responsibilities. In the first place, two significant female figures in Edna's life, Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, provide Edna with a different perspective that enables her to reconsider her own position in the family and society. This new perspective makes a big impact on Edna in her attempt to gain a new identity by presenting her with a new alternative for the rest of her life– "New Woman" (Elz, 2003: 18).

To start with, Adèle Ratignolle is indeed presented as an "ideal mother-woman image" (Streater, 2007: 408) and "the ideal of Creole womanhood" (Gray, 2004: 57). Unlike Edna, Adèle happily performs her roles as a wife and mother in accordance with the ideal image of woman in the 19th century society. Peggy Skaggs argues that Adèle's identity is defined by her family alone, and that her function in the family is as a "patriarchal ideal of the submissive female who writes her history only through her family" (quoted in Montashery, 2013: 147). It is important to note that when Edna visits the Ratignolle couple in their homes, she realizes that Adele seems a fairly contented housewife taking care of her husband and children; on the

other hand, Edna thinks that Adele willingly allows herself to be in a pitiful position as seen in the quotation below,

Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,--a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium." It had crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression (*TA*, 88).

Adele has no other concern than the needs of her husband and children; she does not have any "sense of individual selfhood" (quoted in Gray, 2004: 58). On the other hand, she is depicted as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (*TA*, 13), as she cares much about her physical appearance, which she considers vital to her existence (Gray, 2004: 57). Adele stands out with four important virtues: "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (quoted in Kaplon, 2012).

Unlike Adele, Mademoiselle Reisz is described as "a disagreeable little woman" (39) who does not show any sign of feminine features in her appearance. She leads a lonely life that centers around her music (Gray, 2004: 63). Commenting on this particular feature of Mademoiselle Reisz, Peggy Skaggs says, "only through music can this homely, lonely little woman express herself and communicate with people" (quoted in Gray, 2004: 63). Like the American poet Emily Dickinson, who never got married and who preferred to lead a secluded life, Reisz is depicted as an unusual woman who remains "unmarried", "childless", "eccentric in manner and in dress", and "alienated from society" (Stone, 1986: 28).

Like Edna, Kate deeply feels the harsh reality of patriarchal society in her life, with the result that she attempts to escape from the prison of traditional conceptions of gender which assign woman a subordinate status in society. Having spent many years as a devoted wife and mother in her family, Kate feels that all through her marriage she limited her life by committing herself to the conventional roles assigned to her as a wife and mother. Undeniably, it is the patriarchal culture that “silenced” Kate and made her existence totally worthless for as long as twenty five years, and did not give her the chance to gain self-awareness (Ayan, 2015: 6). For years, Kate has been forced to ignore her own individuality and desires because of the duties the society has imposed on her as a wife and mother. This point is clearly illustrated in the following extract,

A woman dressed suitably for a family afternoon walked back across the lawn, but with care so that the grass did not mark her shoes. Her own choice would have been to go barefooted, to discard her stockings, and to wear something like a muu-muu or a sari or a sarong – something of that sort – with her hair straight to her shoulders. (*TSBD*, 10)

As can be seen in the above extract, the society dictates that Kate’s appearance should be “appropriate for this middle-class suburb and her position in it as her husband’s wife. And, of course, as the mother of her children” (*TSBD*,10). Like Edna in *The Awakening*, Kate begins to feel increasingly skeptical about her identity, which she used to accept without questioning, as reflected in her own questions, “Choose? When do I ever choose? Have I ever chosen?” (*TSBD*, 9). One of the most important events showing Kate’s imprisonment in society occurs when she starts to travel to Spain to attend a conference, with a young man called Jeffrey, who later becomes her lover. By the time they arrive in Spain, the couple is “classified as an immoral one” (*TSBD*, 43) in the eyes of people around them, mainly due to social conditioning. In addition to this, as the couple are checking in a hotel there, the desk clerk gets shocked by the age gap between Kate and her friend. This situation is clearly seen in the quotation below:

They could not be mother and son—no, impossible. Brother and sister? No, one could not believe that a single womb had produced two such dissimilar human types. They were an unlikely marriage? No, their being together lacked the congruence of mood and movement by which one recognizes the married—and then, there were the documents, at the desk. There was nothing else, they must be lovers. (*TSBD*, 43)

Like Edna, Kate also meets two female characters: Mary Finchley and Maureen, who help Kate discover her true position in the family as well as in the society. Though Mary is a married woman with children, she freely indulges in extra-marital relations with other men with a sheer indifference to the moral norms prevalent in society. Kate regards Mary as an unscrupulous woman who does not feel “any sense of guilt” (*TSBD*, 118) for her escapades. Mary’s immoral and irresponsible manners in the family stand in sharp contrast to Kate’s sense of responsibility as a wife and mother. Moreover, there is no question of love in the relationship between Mary and her husband. In fact, Kate gets shocked when Mary says, “I chose Bill because he had a better job than the rest” (*TSBD*, 118). Generally, Kate and Mary do not share the same ideas over woman’s role at home as well as in society. On one occasion, however, Kate agrees with Mary’s suggestion that children should not be placed at the center of one’s life: “Why should we scale ourselves down, children shouldn’t be allowed to be tyrants” (*TSBD*, 10). It is clear that Kate’s personality has been shaped by the demands of the other family members. Burdened with the duties of wifery and motherhood, it has taken her too long to realize that “she had been set like a machine by twenty-odd years of being a wife and mother” (*TSBD*, 29) (Ayan, 2015: 8).

Another friend of Kate’s, Maureen is presented as a young girl with an independent spirit. Maureen does not have any plans and expectations for the future, but she is in the process of building her identity as can be noted in the following extract,

Next day Maureen said she wanted to buy a dress: she had clothes in heaps all over her room. She went out behind heavy dark glasses, in search of a fresh identity, or mask. Or uniform? She could come back as anything at all; she might just as well be wearing a nun's habit as a belly dancer's ... envy, oh yes, this was envy all right. Maureen could choose to dress as a gipsy or as a young boy or a matron in the course of a day: it was some kind of freedom (*TSBD*, 115).

Out of curiosity, Maureen wants to learn about Kate's experiences in marriage. Upon her request, Kate tells her friend about the sense of dissatisfaction she has been experiencing in her marriage, while at the same time complaining about the heavy burden of her domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, Kate tells Maureen that she has been cheated on by her husband many times, which has caused her to lose her feeling of trust in him. Having learned Kate's thoughts and feelings about marriage, Maureen feels more and more detached from the idea of marriage. In a dialogue with Kate, she says "I'm not going to be like you - it's my responsibility, saying no. I'm not going to be like my mother. You're maniacs. You're mad" (*TSBD*, 109). It is evident that both Kate and Maureen have an intense desire to escape from the traditional gender roles and stereotypes which deny them the opportunity to find their true identity and express their genuine emotions. Out of an impulse to achieve freedom, both women struggle to break out of the patriarchal ideology which imposes severe restrictions on their need to assert their identity in the societies they live.

CHAPTER II

2.1 DISCOVERY OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Both Kate and Edna feel imprisoned in a society that views woman as a mere object. Accordingly, these characters attempt to escape from the confines of the traditional gender roles defined by men in a patriarchal society. Eventually, these women realize that men are attracted to them not for their true selves, but for their physical appearance. Stifled in her long marriage, Kate is in a process of self-discovery, which involves achieving her true feminine identity. Through flashbacks, Kate recalls what her life had been like before she got married and became a wife and mother. She desperately thinks about how severely her motherly responsibilities have affected her life, turning it, as it were, into “an obsession; darkening her life” (Ayan, 2015: 7).

Reminiscing about her memories as a young girl, Kate remembers herself sitting on the veranda of her grandfather’s house where she spends one year before getting married,

... a girl as fragile as a camellia with a dead-white skin and heavy dark-red hair, wearing a white embroidered linen dress designed to expose and conceal throat and shoulders, sat on a verandah in a swing chair, that she slowly pushed back and forth with a foot which she was conscious of being an object so sexual the young men present couldn’t keep their eyes and fantasies away from it (*TSBD*, 13).

These lines give a description of Kate's growing consciousness in the process of rediscovering her sexual attraction (Klein, 2002: 230), which has been ignored for the sake of her husband and children so that she can fulfill the requirements of wifehood and mothering. Gradually, Kate becomes conscious of the fact that she cannot find her true identity in the obsessive mothering role, which, as she has painfully discovered, is now seen "like a betrayal of what she really was" (*TSBD*, 68). Having sacrificed herself for her family and having been denied a truly feminine identity, Kate feels "as if she were locked forever in a large box with four perpetually exploding egos" (*TSBD*, 50). She realizes that she has been trapped within the traditional stereotypes of wifehood and motherhood: "All her life she has been performing these roles to gratify men" (Aghazadeh, 2011: 16). Brought up in a patriarchal society, Kate has been made to conceal her femininity by dressing in a manner "appropriate for this middle-class suburb and her position in it as her husband's wife. And, of course, as the mother of her children" (*TSBD*, 10). Eventually, she becomes aware that her way of sitting, dressing, and caring for her physical appearance has been the major factors that have restricted her freedom through the "gender codes" that have been shaped according to the needs of men (Aghazadeh, 2011: 15). Gradually, Kate realizes that the society in which she lives regards her merely as "an object of the gaze or an object of the institutional-social mechanisms of gender-construction" (Aghazadeh, 2011: 15). After she has completed her job as a translator in the summer period, Kate rents a room in Maureen's flat where she lives through different experiences, questioning her own self as well as her domestic responsibilities. On one occasion, while Kate is walking in front of a couple of workers, she takes off her jacket and makes small changes in her appearance to reveal her feminine beauty. As might be expected, the workers begin to look at her with great interest and admiration. A few minutes later, Kate walks past the same workers wearing her jacket; yet, this time she cannot catch their attention:

she walked away out of sight, and there, took off her jacket—
Maureen's—showing her fitting dark dress. She tied her hair
dramatically with a scarf. Then she strolled back in front of the
workmen, hips conscious of themselves. A storm of whistles,

calls, invitations. Out of sight the other way, she made her small transformation and walked back again: the men glanced at her, did not see her. She was trembling with rage: it was a rage, it seemed to her, that she had been suppressing for a lifetime. And it was a front for worse, a misery that she did not want to answer, for it was saying again and again: This is what you have been doing for years and years and years (*TSBD*, 115).

Kate feels angry with herself for having concealed her physical beauty and suppressing her true feelings. When she was a young lady, Kate regarded herself as “an image to be looked at, as an erotic object” (Aghazadeh, 2011: 15) a pretty girl greatly admired by young men. However, as a married woman Kate has bitterly found that her physical appearance has been defined by the norms of society rather than her own choices. Painfully aware of her own predicament, Kate attempts to break out of the chains of the societal standards which have restrained her feminine identity and limited her life to fulfilling the responsibilities of wifedom and motherhood.

Having dedicated herself to loving and caring for her husband and children for many years, Kate suddenly realizes that she has got nothing left to share with her husband and children. She decides to shape the course of her own life, giving full rein to her sexual desires, which she has suppressed for so many years. Deprived of love and affection in her marriage, Kate attempts to experience these feelings in her relationship with a young man named Jeffrey with whom she got acquainted on a business trip. Actually, in her inner world, Kate experiences a dilemma because she is torn between domestic responsibilities and her physiological drives. While on the one hand she thinks that she has to care about her husband and children, on the other hand she tries to meet her emotional needs and fulfill her sexual desires as a woman by finding a young lover. When Jeffrey gets sick, Kate begins to feel compassion for him, just like the way she felt for her husband and children during 25 years of marriage. Finally, she decides that she will not be able to spend the rest of her life nursing the young man. So, she makes up her mind to leave him and return to her

family. Thus, Kate's attempt to find out her feminine sexuality ends up with disappointment and frustration.

During her sexual awakening, Edna initially explores her sexuality with Robert Lebrun, with whom she liked spending a lot of time on the island that summer. Edna's sexual awakening gradually occurs as Robert shows close attention to her, thereby arousing her long-suppressed emotional and sexual desires. It is evident that Edna does not have a happy and sexually-satisfying relationship with her husband because he has never paid enough attention to her. All the more surprising is that Mr. Pontellier seems to be totally indifferent to Edna and shows no signs of jealousy when she spends a lot of time with Robert. Though Edna and Robert are in love with each other, they do not express their love explicitly, nor do they say what they want or what they expect from this relationship. Once, during their vacation on the island, Edna and Robert are sitting alone in her cottage. Since Mr. Pontellier has not arrived yet, Edna insists that Robert not leave her at the moment:

Robert: Did you say I should stay till Mr. Pontellier came back?

Edna: I said you might if you wished to.

He seated himself again and rolled a cigarette, which he smoked in silence. Neither did Mrs. Pontellier speak. No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbing of desire (*TA*, 47).

It is obvious that Edna and Robert are involved in a romantic relationship, but they never come to the point where they confess to loving each other. Having been brought up with a conservative mindset, Robert feels guilty for having a relationship with a married woman. So, he decides to leave the island.

In addition to having a love affair with Robert, Edna's experiment with painting becomes an important means for her to express her feminine side. As Martha Cutter says, Edna "seeks voice in her painting" (quoted in Montashery, 2013: 148) to escape from the conventional roles assigned to her as a mother and wife.

Moreover, she becomes increasingly involved with swimming; so, she becomes more confident and feels that she is no longer a victim of male-dominated society and her mind becomes free of the limitations surrounding her:

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before (*TA*, 43).

As she starts learning to swim, Edna feels assured that she has achieved total control over her body, and that she is feeling strong enough not to let anyone control it. Within this context, the symbol of the sea becomes an embodiment of the process of Edna's sexual awakening, representing her newfound sense of freedom:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, and inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (*TA*, 21-22).

Refusing to perform her domestic and social duties for the sake of her family, Edna comes to the realization of her own potential as an independent woman and discovers her feminine nature as a sensual being with emotional and sexual desires.

2.2 DREAMS AND MEMORIES

This chapter involves a discussion of Kate and Edna's dreams and memories as reflections of their real-life experiences at large, and their struggle to find out their true selves in particular. Faced with an identity crisis, the two female protagonists feel obliged to explore "the pictures of their lives so as to figure out what has gone wrong" (Lazar, 2013: 70). Kate's dreams are mostly related to her own journey to achieve a new identity. She has her first dream when she accepts the job offer – translator- from a friend of her husband, and then continues to have a series of dreams until she attains self-realization after abandoning her role as a wife and mother. On the other hand, having spent all her life "inside the timetable of other people's needs" (*TSBD*, 49), Kate has some fears about the job she has been offered, which are reflected in her first dream. At first, she cannot decide whether to accept the job offer or not, but then she accepts it with the hope that this is a life-time opportunity that should not be missed. For a moment, she feels "like a long-term prisoner who knows she is going to have to face freedom in the morning" (*TSBD*, 13-14). As she accepts the job offer, Kate strangely happens to say, "Of course I'd like to. Can I do the washing up first?" (*TSBD*, 14). It is not so easy for her to stop thinking about her domestic responsibilities. Kate feels uncertain about what the future holds for her: she suddenly feels "a very cold wind had started to blow, straight towards her, from the future" (*TSBD*, 14).

Kate's feeling of uncertainty about what is lying ahead of her in the future is clearly manifested in a cycle of dreams which help her achieve a new identity (Stout, 1990: 8). Kate's return home at the end of the novel is an important scene in that it is closely related to what happens in the dream cycle (Lefcowitz, 2002: 108). The dominant image in Kate's dreams is that of the seal, which carries symbolic meanings. After receiving the job offer, Kate sees a seal in her dream:

The seal was lying stranded and helpless among dry rocks high on a cold hillside. It was moaning. She picked it up. It was heavy. She asked if it were all right, if she could help it. It moaned, and she knew she had to get it to water. She started to carry the seal in her arms down the hill (*TSBD*, 21).

Her dream reflects the fear that one feels when faced with a critical choice that will change one's life altogether. Kate feels completely troubled in making this choice and there is no one to talk to about whether she should get the job. Metaphorically, the image of the seal stranded on the rocks symbolizes Kate's sense of loneliness at home and her lack of experience in work life, which account for her initial response –hesitation- to accept the job offer. From another perspective, the seal in her dream can be thought to stand for Kate's inner self as well as her desire to achieve freedom. As Jan Verleun argues, "The journey with the seal obviously indicates the stages of Kate's progress toward liberation" (Verleun, 1985: 624).

In another dream, Kate sees a seal with scars "some of which were fresh and bleeding" (30). Also, "there were many scars, too, of old wounds" (*TSBD*, 30). She is walking along the shore accompanied by the seal; yet, she is not quite sure whether she is "going in the right direction" (*TSBD*, 30) with the wounded seal. She does not know which direction to follow. Here, the "scars" and "old wounds" of the seal stand for Kate's long-term physical and psychological confinement in her house. For years, she has had a depressing life which merely consisted in fulfilling roles as wife, mother and housewife. Eventually however, she painfully realizes that there is no one left in the family whom she should care for. On the other hand, the seal's new wounds serve as a symbol of Kate's feelings of concern and uncertainty about her own future, and her suspicion that she could still be going along the wrong way.

In the next dream, the injured seal is out of sight. Therefore, Kate feels sympathy and pity for the seal which is no longer there. She regrets not having carried it to a safer place. She asks herself: "Oh the seal, my poor seal, that is my responsibility, that is what I have to do, where is the seal?" (*TSBD*, 40). From the

words above, one can infer that Kate thinks she has duties to fulfill in her life, and that she should not lose herself like the seal.

In another dream, Kate sees the seal as “weaker” and its body as “dry”, and thinks that “she must get some water for it” (*TSBD*, 56). Like Kate, the seal has no energy left to move further, nor does it show any signs of life. Since beginning her new job, Kate has been travelling to many countries to attend international conferences. She feels so exhausted that she does not have enough strength to travel to Spain with her lover, Jeffrey. She knows that the seal needs water to hold on to life, just as she needs motivation and a goal that will make her life meaningful. In the same dream, she finds herself in a wooden house; but the house is deserted –there are not any family members inside. In her dream, “she laid down the seal on the stone before the fireplace and tried to blow the fire into life” (*TSBD*, 56). This dream causes her to remember her own house which does not show any signs of life as her husband and children leave for summer vacation. Moreover, she thinks that “she had to clean the house, to fetch wood for the fire from the forests before the winter snow came down, to get food, to take warm clothes out of the chests and lay them ready for herself and for the people in the house who, she knew, were her family” (*TSBD*, 56). It is clearly seen that her roles of mother and housewife, even when these identities are more removed, cause her to experience the psychological stress which is imposed on her throughout all her life stages. Also, she finds a young man quietly sitting on the top floor of the house, and thinks that he is her lover. Wanting to stay with the young man, Kate suddenly remembers the seal and says “I’m sorry, I want to stay with you, but I must take the seal to the sea first” (*TSBD*, 56). Jan Verleun states that “this dream prefigures her final decision to return to Michael, her husband” (Verleun, 1985: 626). Kate is not ready to give up her roles as wife and mother after 25 years of wifedom and motherhood. She wants to help the seal instead of leaving it to its fate. Symbolically, this could mean that Kate can afford to let her former self die; under the influence of social conditioning and traditional upbringing, Kate feels that she needs to preserve her former self in some way. In the patriarchal world in which she is desperately trapped, Kate cannot fully unchain herself from the traditional roles and responsibilities assigned to her, despite her wish to do so.

In another dream, Kate finds herself in the middle of some wild animals which attack her and the seal,

Suddenly, wild animals leaped from cages that had been opened in the arena walls. Lions, leopards, wolves, tigers. She ran with the seal and climbed as high as she could up the stands, while the animals came after them both... There was an awful noise of snarling and roaring. She thought she would not have the strength to hold on, to keep the seal safe for long (*TSBD*, 69).

She thinks she will not be able to protect the seal from the savage animals, but eventually she succeeds in escaping from this dangerous situation with her injured self (Vişan, 42). What happens in this dream becomes a manifestation of a most painful moment in Kate's inner journey. The wilds animal attacking her and the seal represent all the problems that she has lived through her marriage, which would almost destroy her "real self." This dream serves as a symbol of Kate's anger and hatred for her past which is manifested in lions, leopards, wolves, and tigers trying to pull the seal from her and destroy it (Verleun, 1985: 627). From what happens in the dream, one can infer that Kate feels hatred towards her old identity as a wife, mother and housewife and that is why she tries, despite her physical weakness, to rescue the seal which represents the potential for a better future. Additionally, in the dream, the outside world is regarded as "hostile" and "frenzied" as, all through her marriage, Kate has lived to meet the needs of the sexist society in which she, as a woman, is seen merely as a sex object (Lefcowitz, 2002: 114).

In the next dream, Kate continues to carry the seal which is

inert in her arms, its head on her shoulder... She could hear its dry harsh irregular breathing. She should wet the seal's hide again. But everything was frozen... It was snowing again. She lifted the seal, whose weight was now easier because it was breathing and alive, and went on her way north (*TSBD*, 78).

This dream reveals the true nature of the relationship between Kate and the seal. The animal puts its head on Kate's shoulder, which suggests that it has full faith in Kate as the only person to rescue it (Vişan, 43). Paradoxically, Kate's close contact with the seal is a reflection of both her desire to save the meaningful moments spent with her family and her intention to remove them altogether from her life. Caught in a dilemma, Kate's dreams, in which the seal figures as a central image, serve as a mirror that reflects her desire to get out of this stressful situation. Furthermore, the seal is embodiment of Kate's strong wish to find a companion, someone who will make it easier for her to become adapted to her new identity (Verleun, 1985: 625).

Another important image that dominates Kate's dreams is that of the cold weather. Throughout her journey towards self-awareness, Kate's dreams occur in a setting characterized by gloomy weather, freezing cold, and snow, which symbolize "her spiritual malaise during her journey of discoveries" (Verleun, 1985: 624). It is evident that Kate's physical and spiritual journey with the injured seal, which takes the form of a challenging experience, involves feelings of fear, confusion, and hesitation. Both kinds of journey are characterized by a desperate need for self-exploration to be able to achieve a heightened level of self-awareness, which turns out to be a rather painful experience.

Kate's next dream shows that she feels extremely concerned about herself and the seal; particularly, she is overpowered by the fear of dying:

I don't know how far ahead the sea is. If there is any sea. I'm full of fear that I am walking the wrong way after all. Perhaps I'll never find the open water the seal needs. Perhaps it's all ice and snow and dark always, forever, there is no end to it—perhaps I and the seal will fall into the snow and never get up again. But why then should I be dreaming at all? What would be the point of a dream that had to end in me and the seal dying, just dying, after all that effort? (TSBD, 111)

In a pessimistic mood, Kate thinks that her efforts to reach for the seal stranded on the rock could come to nothing. Her lack of conviction almost makes her lose any hope of uniting with the seal, which symbolizes her failure to retain her inner self.

What Kate sees in her last dream is quite different from those she has had before. In her dream, even though the dominant atmosphere is still “a thick cold dark”, “a fresh warm breeze” (*TSBD*, 126) softly touches on her face. Yet, she is no longer worried about the seal. She thinks that it is “full of life, and, like her, of hope” (*TSBD*, 126). With a great effort and strength, “she let the seal slide into the water. It sank out of sight, then came up, and rested its head for the last time on the edge of the rock” (*TSBD*, 126). Eventually, Kate completes her dream sequence by struggling to rescue the wounded seal and to return it to the sea, though with great difficulty. On the other hand, Kate’s reminiscences during her talks with Maureen, which are mostly related to wifhood and motherhood, reveal that “a slow catharsis had taken place enabling her to recollect days of happiness together with her husband Michael and the children” (Verleun, 1985: 631). Within this context, it is important to note that the happy recollections shared with her family help Kate complete the seal dream and start a new phase in her life (Mainali, 2009: 7).

Obviously, Kate is about to make a critical decision at this stage of her life as to whether she should put an end to her journey and return home so that she can reunite with her family. In her dialogue with Kate, Maureen recommends her friend to make a choice as soon as possible: “You must finish the dream before you go back to your family. You mustn’t go back before it is finished” (*TSBD*, 111). Hoping that Kate may reunite with her husband and children, Maureen advises her to pull herself out of the negative atmosphere of the dreams and to continue her life with her family as she used to do. With a renewed sense of self-confidence, “she saw that the sun was in front of her, not behind, not far behind, under the curve of the earth, which was where it had been for so long. She looked at it, a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing” (*TSBD*, 126). This description, which marks the end of Kate’s inner journey, signifies “the healing process of her own psyche” (Goswami, 2011: 137). As the seal returns to its natural environment, now it is

Kate's turn to go back to her family, but this time, having gained awareness about who she really is, what she really wants, and how she can avoid become trapped again (Goswami, 2011: 137). Ultimately, Kate has come to the realization that the seal was not a dream, but a reality.

Like dreams in *The Summer Before the Dark*, memories have a symbolic significance in *The Awakening*. There are marked parallels between Kate's dreams and Edna's childhood memories, both being loaded with symbolic meanings. One of the memories involves Edna's sitting and talking with Adele on the island where they are having a vacation with their families. Once, Edna remembers what happened in Kentucky where she grew up. In her flashback, she is walking through a large grass field on a summer day. Finding that the grass is higher than her waist, Edna throws up her arms to push back the grass. This memory is suggestive of Edna's desire to achieve independence from all kinds of restrictions, as well as her determination and struggle to do so. Edna's resolve to fashion a new life for herself and chart the course of her own life is clearly manifested in her desire to learn swimming, which finds its parallel in the scene where she throws up her arms to push back the grass. That summer, Edna has a similar experience:

The hot wind beating in my face made me think – without any connection that I can trace – of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now! (*TA*, 26).

During the summer vacation, Edna thinks about the moments of freedom in her girlhood while watching the sea with Adele. Once again, Edna refers to the image of green field when she confides in Adele about her feelings of loneliness and desperation: "Sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again, idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (*TA*, 27). As can be seen

from this quotation, Edna begins to feel lonelier and more dissatisfied than ever. The reason for her desperation is that she has been forced to accept “the stories and visions of others,” which implies that, since her childhood, Edna has had to “submit and be silent” (Urigo, 1990: 26). Until that summer, she had thought that sharing her own thoughts and emotions with someone was not important. In Creole society, where women can freely talk about their private lives without feeling any embarrassment, Edna feels free to talk to someone she can trust. When Edna shares her childhood story with Adele, she feels “a first breath of freedom” (*TA*, 30) which stimulates her to narrate her inner thoughts to a greater extent. Edna realizes that as she shares the thoughts and emotions stored in her memory, they carry certain specific meanings (Urigo, 1990: 26).

In another memory, Edna and Adele are chatting in her cottage. For a moment, Adele touches Edna’s hand, causing her to remember a cavalry officer who visited her father in Kentucky. Edna recalls feeling great admiration and passion for this young man who had soon disappeared from her life.: “She could not leave his presence when he was there, nor remove her eyes from his face” (*TA*, 28). Now, Edna is painfully aware of the fact that she has never felt the same passion for her husband. Edna continues to tell Adele about her life. In another memory of hers, she recalls falling in love with a young gentleman who came to visit a lady –his fiancée– on a neighboring farm. Edna’s realization that “she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing to the engaged young man was a bitter affliction to her” (*TA*, 28). She remembers experiencing great disappointment in her encounter with both the gentleman and the cavalry officer.

Both Kate and Edna want to break out of the restraints of marital and social norms in their attempt to achieve their goal of becoming as autonomous individuals, which finds reflection in their dreams and memories. Through these dreams and memories, Edna and Kate seek alternative ways to express their suppressed desire to envision and shape a new course of life for themselves. When Kate returns home, she has become a more independent and self-assured person than when she left. However, still she does not know what she should do with her life; she feels the same kind of uncertainties that she did when she had first set out on her physical journey;

she has failed to resolve the uncertainties surrounding her marriage and family. On the other hand, what happens in one of her dreams –at the end of her spiritual journey with the seal- symbolizes Kate’s ultimate success in overcoming her desperate situation as an unhappy wife and mother. Kate has succeeded in returning the seal to the sea, which suggests that she no longer feels as lonely and miserable as she once did. As a result of both journeys, Kate turns back home with a new-found inner strength and optimism. After traveling to various countries on business, she has finally decided to return to her family, just like the way the seal returns to the sea after staying on land for a while.

Unlike Kate who finally comes to a point where she admits the realities of her own life, Edna cannot afford to face the harsh reality, for she finds it extremely painful and unbearable. Oppressed by her father and her husband, Edna has always been forced to obey the rules of patriarchal society; therefore, she has no desire to reunite with her family. An introverted woman, Edna feels increasingly depressed in the face of the male-dominated values prevailing in the society, becoming gradually isolated from her family and friends. Within this context, Edna’s habit of recalling her past memories reveals that she does not want to face the real world; instead, as a woman has failed to find happiness in her marriage, Edna takes refuge in her childhood memories interspersed with dreams.

CHAPTER III

3.1 RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL NORMS AND DOMESTIC DUTIES

Both Kate and Edna have initiated a quest for identity and a process of self-realization, constantly questioning themselves as to who they are in terms of their household responsibilities and the societal expectations surrounding and oppressing them in the patriarchal society in which they live. In *The Awakening*, Edna refuses to be seen as an object in marriage and motherhood, a circumstance that does not allow her realize her own potential as an individual in the family. Within a social context, she has been oppressed since her girlhood by social and cultural structures which she cannot understand and internalize. One night during her stay on the island, Edna refuses to sleep with her husband and “her resistance signifies self-ownership of her sexuality” (Gray, 2004: 61). She wants to prove that she has got full control over her own body, not letting anyone, including her husband, violate it. On the other hand, Edna refuses to perform her domestic responsibilities after being abandoned by her lover, Robert. In one scene, Edna experiences a severe depression when her relationship with Robert has suddenly ended:

Robert’s going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing (*TA*, 72).

Once Edna believed that she found true love with Robert. Now, however, she feels a bitter sense of disappointment as she learns that Robert will abandon her. Severely frustrated by Robert’s decision to leave her for good, Edna begins to neglect her family duties, not caring about her husband and children as she used to: “She began

to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her” (*TA*, 72). Bitterly heartbroken, Edna no longer receives guests on a particular day of the week as “this custom is entirely for the financial benefit of the family and for the professional ambitions of the husband” (Gray, 2004: 62). Moreover, according to the established norms of the society, wives, in general, have no right to choose the people they want to invite to the reception days; therefore, they cannot truly enjoy such “socialization” (Gray, 2004: 62). This is another reason why Edna does not want to follow the traditional norms that society requires her to obey. By doing so, she willfully refuses to live up to societal expectations. From another perspective, Edna’s love for Robert can be evaluated as an act of rebellion on her part against social norms. In fact, Edna’s rebellious spirit is clearly manifested in her extra-marital relationship with Robert and her total indifference to what other people will think about this relationship. However, this love affair comes to an end when Robert tells her about her decision to leave her. Edna challenges Robert saying that she cares neither about him nor her husband, who sees her as one of his possessions: “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, ‘Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,’ I should laugh at you both” (*TA*, 171). It is clear that Edna is determined to demonstrate her will to gain a truly autonomous identity. A sworn non-conformist, she never yields in her struggle to break free from the restraints of an identity dictated by social and cultural norms.

Edna’s rebellious spirit can be clearly seen in the scene where she tells her friend, Mademoiselle Reisz, about her intention to move into a new house. The idea of moving into a small house which she herself owns sounds very enticing to her. Edna feels that if she continues to live the rest of her life in the same house with her husband, she will never become fully independent:

Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband’s bounty in casting off her allegiance. She did not know how it would be when he returned. There would have to be an understanding, an explanation. Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she

felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself (*TA*, 126).

Upon hearing that her wife has decided to move into another house, Leonce tries to dissuade his wife from her decision: “He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse; and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say” (*TA*, 148). Leonce wants to remind Edna that patriarchal society requires obedience. Despite her husband’s opposition, Edna feels certain that she needs to lead a thoroughly autonomous life, which she sees as a requirement for achieving a sense of fulfillment. With this radical change in her life, Edna develops “a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual” (*TA*, 149). Revolting against patriarchal dominance to achieve independence and personal fulfillment, Edna takes a step toward discovering her sexuality and becoming an autonomous individual (Gray, 2004: 67). Edna’s experience can be viewed as a reflection of the way terms such as “self-ownership” and “ownership of property” became vital acquisitions of the 19th century feminist movement in the framework of the Married Woman’s Property Acts. Before passing property reform laws in the early days of the late 19th century, women did not have the right to possess their own property or deal with any sort of business contracts (Gray, 2004: 68). Later on, as Stange puts it, “The Married Woman’s Property Acts” brought radical changes for married women with regard to “the rights of ownership” in the late 19th century (quoted in Gray, 2004: 68).

After a long process of suffering, Edna has finally decided not to live within a society bent on oppressing women in every way possible. Having turned out to be a resolute nonconformist, Edna is strong enough to go against the mainstream and openly declare what she wants though almost everyone around her says that her actions are totally wrong. When Edna achieves awareness about herself in an emotional and physical sense, she realizes that she does not have so many options in life. Edna has two choices in the life ahead of her: she will either turn back to her husband and children and continue her life from where she left or maintain her present position and live as an independent woman free from all kind of domestic

and social responsibilities, a decision that will ultimately drive her to suicide. Edna's ambition to achieve freedom from familial and social restrictions finds expression in her desire "to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (*TA*, 43). Realizing that she will not be able to set herself free from the familial duties and social constraints of patriarchal society, Edna decides to commit suicide in a final attempt to find comfort by "seeking refuge in the maternal realm of the sea" (Montashery, 2013: 149). In the last scene of the novel, Edna returns to the island alone and swims far out into the ocean and leaves herself to the waves of the sea with many childhood memories in her mind which foreshadow her imminent death:

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, and then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air (*TA*, 183).

As she stands naked on the shore, Edna feels "like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (*TA*, 182). Her final thoughts are concerned not with her immediate surroundings -including the sea that surrounds her- but with the day she walked through the grass in her childhood. From Freudian point of view, Edna's mind is preoccupied with "the oceanic feelings of infancy" –a sensation of eternity, a feeling of being unbounded, typical of the period of early childhood when the infant is unaware of the boundaries between her own body, her mother's, and her environment (Taylor and Fineman, 1996: 35, 44). Ironically, however, Edna's final attempt to take refuge in the sea –metaphorically, her wish to return to the period of infancy – proves fatal. As Taylor and Fineman put it,

The final avatar of Edna's awakening reveals her desire to return to the oceanic phase of her childhood and the embracing arms of the lost mother. But, the sea, like her lovers, betrays her at last; its image

of infinity masks the destructive force of regression to the inner world of the infantile psyche (Taylor and Fineman, 1996: 44).

In this scene, Edna's walk through the tall, sea-like grass as if she touches her dead mother's hand can be regarded as a reflection of her desire to return to the "symbiosis" of the oceanic state in order to find comfort in her mother's soothing arms. The loss of a parent early in life is one of the most crucial factors in the development of adult character and has a traumatic impact on adult life. Therefore, Edna has developed a fixation in her longing for a symbolic reunion with her lost mother. She believes that only when she dies can she achieve this reunion with her mother and become truly independent.

Like Edna, Kate finds herself stuck in the roles of wifedom and motherhood, as society has imposed limitations that have prevented her from realizing her true self since her childhood. Accordingly, Kate tries to resist becoming restricted by the conventional roles imposed on her in society. On one occasion, when Kate and her lover, Jeffrey, travel to Spain, Jeffrey suddenly becomes ill and he is "wet with sweat" and "shivering" (*TSBD*, 59). Contrary to what is expected of her, Kate leaves her sick lover in Spain and returns to London, feeling, for the first time, independent and deliberately refusing to fulfil her mother role (Klein, 2002: 234). In the words of Betsy Draine, "The former Kate would have judged [her own actions] as inconceivably heartless and irresponsible", but now she becomes fully aware that it is the "first sign of her success" by deserting her motherly role (quoted in Klein, 2002: 234). Kate's refusal to perform the roles assigned to her in traditional society can be illustrated by another example. At the beginning of the novel, Kate's hair and clothes are fashioned by social norms in accordance with her traditional roles as a wife and a mother. However, at the end of the novel or the end of her psychological journey, we find that Kate's hair style and manner of clothing as well as her behavior and posture have changed significantly, which is a reflection of her stubborn refusal to comply with the expectations of society (Ayan, 2015: 10):

She would walk into her home with her hair undressed, with her hair tied straight back for utility; rough and streaky, and the widening grey band showing like a statement of intent. It was as if the rest of her – body, feet, even face, which was aging but amenable – belonged to everyone else. But her hair – no! No one was going to lay hands on that (*TSBD*, 127-128).

Kate feels that her family does not like her new appearance, specifically her “unstyled hair showing a wide band of grey at the roots” (Stout, 1990: 16). However, she is resolved that, no matter what they think about her, she will not change her mind and will not have her hair colored, ever again (Stout, 1990: 16). Since her childhood, Kate has lived in an oppressive environment where “everything was said [by those around her]: thoughts, feelings, impulses...” (*TSBD*, 128) and that’s why her determination not to change her hair is so vital for her; in fact, it is “a matter of self-preservation, that she should be able to make a statement, that she should be understood, then she would, and would not do certain things to her hair...” (*TSBD*, 128). With her new way of looking at the world, Kate feels that she does not need the approval of others about the propriety of her new appearance. Alina Dana Vişan argues that Kate’s hair symbolizes “the first step toward breaking loose from the traps that social milieu has woven around her” (Vişan, 44). Now, Kate refuses to dye her hair, saying “*no*: no, no, no, **NO**: a statement which would be concentrated into her hair” (*TSBD*, 128). Her words reveal that she does not want to let anyone interfere with her new life and her new appearance.

Having made up her mind to turn back to her family, Kate makes radical changes not only in her physical appearance, but also in her attitude toward her family, with the resolve that she will never assume the obsessive mothering role she used to do in the family. She wants to develop a new relationship with her husband and children based on tolerance, goodwill, and understanding, showing due respect to each member of the family. As a matter of fact, Kate has turned out to be a different kind of woman with a new way of looking at like. She has come to the realization that one should live to please oneself, not others. Now, Kate is fully

convinced that she no longer needs the confirmation of others to make decisions for her future life. Despite the many difficulties she has been confronted with, Kate has succeeded in accomplishing her aim of helping the seal reach into the water. Just as the seal safely gets into the water –its natural environment, Kate decides that it is time to return to her family, where she belongs. Now, she has become a stronger person. She has achieved a better understanding of her weaknesses and found out new ways to strengthen them.



CONCLUSION

In this paper, two novels -Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*- have been discussed within the framework of the rise and development of feminist movement. Even though these novelists wrote their works in different countries and different periods of time, the female protagonists they created in these novels have common experiences and are driven by similar motives. These protagonists are exposed to domestic and social pressures in the patriarchal societies in which they live. They rebel against the norms dictated by the established institutions of their respective societies such as patriarchy, motherhood, and wifehood. Both characters refuse to submit to the conventions and meet masculine expectations. They want to seek personal freedom and a more fulfilling life in their attempt to break out of the restrictions imposed on them by their respective societies, Edna and Kate leave their home, husband and children for the quest of true independence.

Edna in *The Awakening* feels oppressed by her husband's expectations of her as a wife and mother, as well as with the social pressures of the male-dominated society of late-nineteenth century America. As the male-dominated culture of the late-nineteenth century required women to become subservient to men, women were expected to obey the requirements of marriage and motherhood. They were supposed to arrange social meetings, dinner parties, and deal with cooking and doing domestic work. Dissatisfied with her life as it is, Edna struggles to free herself from the requirements of being a traditional wife and mother. Throughout her life, Edna has tried to overcome many of the restrictions she faced in the family and society. Rather than spending the rest of her life in a marriage devoid of love, and continuing to sacrifice herself as a mother, Edna wants to explore her true identity by removing herself physically and mentally from her family. Out of a strong desire to become a sexually and artistically independent woman, and to isolate herself from New

Orleans society, Edna starts flirting with a young man named Robert while having vacation with her family on an island. Yet, this love affair proves short lived. Having been suddenly abandoned by Robert, Edna feels greatly depressed and alone. She painfully realizes that there is no place in this world where a woman can find a man who will truly understand her feelings. Edna feels overpowered by a growing sense of loneliness and desperation resulting from her realization that no meaningful communication can be formed with Robert: “He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand” (TA, 183).

Initially, Edna has started out with the hope that she can achieve autonomy and identity in the face of the social restrictions imposed upon her by the patriarchal society. Furthermore, Edna believes that once she breaks the chains binding her, she will be able to shape the course of her own life. Before long, however, her illusions are shattered when she realizes that there is no way she can make her dreams come true. Edna’s journey, her attempt to achieve freedom, culminates in an act of self-destruction. Having bitterly come to the realization that “the door into the world is locked and she has no key only because she is a female” (Bai, 2014: 846), Edna finally decides to put an end to her life, leaving herself to the turbulent waves of the ocean. Suddenly, she thinks “of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her body and soul” (TA, 183). By committing suicide, Edna proves that she has the courage to free herself from social constraints once and for all: “Her suicide is an act of liberation and emancipation; therefore, Edna is the ultimate feminist” (Montashery, 2013: 149). As Patricia L. Bradley points out, while the women in the 19th century face with “terror, ambiguity, and seductiveness and stays safely ashore”, Edna “leaves the shore and swims to meet them” (quoted in Bai). In fact, her suicide is a feat of bravery –it is not a defeat, but a victory. As Limin Bai argues, “Edna’s death is neither a moral punishment nor a feminine escape, but a feminist triumph” (Bai, 2014: 848).

Like Edna in *The Awakening*, Kate in *The Summer Before the Dark* is a married woman who feels extremely displeased with her life because she is expected to perform the roles and duties traditionally assigned to her as a wife and mother. For years, Kate has constantly questioned her identity as a mother and wife, trying to find

out some way to put an end to this suffering by creating a new life for herself. One summer Kate remains alone at home when her husband and children spend the summer in different places. She goes abroad and starts working as a translator for a couple of months. There, Kate becomes acquainted with a young man whom she starts flirting with, but their relationship does not last long, for the young man gets sick and Kate leaves him and continues her physical and psychological journeys. Her psychological journey, her attempt to achieve a new identity, is interspersed with seal dreams. This journey has a positive impact on her self-image and inspires her with a renewed hope for a better life. Kate's physical and spiritual journey with the seal helps her break the chains of mothering and taking care of others.

In the final scene, just as the sea returns to the sea, Kate returns to her husband and children after a long vacation in the summer. As Laya Sedhain Mainali puts it, "the returning of the seal to the water represents Kate's rebirth and her returning to her husband and children" (Mainali, 2009: 6). Having suffered a deep spiritual crisis, Kate returns home with a new attitude toward her physical appearance. She no longer tries to live up to the expectations of others regarding the way she looks. Kate refuses to take care of her hair and wear makeup: "She had lost more weight. Her hair stuck out around a face all bones, stiff and frizzy, streaked with orange, grey-rooted. She could not get her brush through it" (TSBD, 78). Now, Kate feels convinced that one's physical appearance does not reveal anything about one's true self. Against the dictates of her family and society regarding her choices about her physical appearance, Kate has learned to say no and do whatever she wanted to. Choosing to live outside the confines of traditional roles of motherhood and wifehood, Kate consciously avoids doing what her husband and children ask her to do.

To summarize, the female protagonists portrayed in *The Awakening* and *The Summer Before the Dark*, try to overcome the societal and familial expectations surrounding them and choose to become the sole agent of their own lives. After a lifetime of suffering, Kate manages to find a reasonable solution in her quest for a new identity. She comes to terms with her past – her husband and children- to continue her life from where she left. Kate fashions for herself a new role in her

family suitable for her new attitude to life. She has gained the insight and strength required to expand the boundaries of her womanhood. However, Edna's efforts to fashion a new identity for herself ends up in suicide. Her final escape from the limitations placed on by her family and society should not be regarded as a failure, because by doing so, Edna has succeeded in saving her essence - her inner-self. The ultimate realization that she has achieved is that the only way she can save herself from the constraints of society is by putting an end to her life. Viewed from this perspective, Edna's death can be seen as a triumphant escape from an oppressive world, an act of true independence.



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